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A PLEA FOR SUMMARIES AND INDEXES.

By E. B. TITCHENER.

When Wundt began the publication of his *Philosophische Studien*, certain critics complained that, not content with giving the results of his investigations, he needlessly inflicted on the reader a statement of the methods whereby the results were obtained.¹ At the present day, such criticism strikes us as almost comical. We require from an experimenter, as a matter of course, that he give a full account of appliances, method, sources of error and safeguards against error, number and character and training of observers, and what not: an account so full that we may be able, if we wish, exactly to repeat his work in other laboratories. As we read the earlier literature, we sigh for the *Rohtabellen*; it is the insufficiency, not the surplusage of detail that strikes us. Under the best conditions, experimental psychology is difficult. We want to be assured, then, before we admit a set of new results into our psychological system, that the conditions of their attainment *were* the best.

This general tendency, to a demand for and a supply of detailed information, has been furthered in a special way by the historical development of the science, by its gradual swing from quantitative determination to qualitative analysis. As late as 1893 so good an experimenter as Merkel could write a tirade against the admission of qualitative factors into method work.² Now, only ten years later, we seem, as we read him, to be reading the language of a different epoch; his standpoint is one that we have long outgrown, and almost forgotten. It is, I think, no exaggeration to say that some of the earlier Leipzig researches, if they had been reported as researches are reported to-day, would have been drawn out to three times their present length.

At any rate, there can be no doubt that our experimental literature is rapidly increasing in bulk,—not only in the sense that more investigations are being published every year, but also in the sense that the single papers are becoming longer. This increase of length throws a very heavy burden upon the shoulders of the psychologist who tries to ‘keep up’ with all

¹ W. Wundt, Schlusswort zum ersten Bande: *Phil. Stud.*, i, 1883, 616.

² J. Merkel: Die Methode der mittleren Fehler, etc. *Phil. Stud.*, ix, 1894, 196 f.

phases of his science. The burden will be cheerfully borne, since its incidence means, without any question, that experimental psychology is really advancing. But there is no reason why it should be made unnecessarily heavy. And my point here is that writers of monographs are apt to make it heavier than it need be.

For one thing, there can be no doubt that many published papers would be improved by condensation and curtailment. The swing towards qualitative detail has gone too far; the authors lack perspective. However, I do not wish to stress this fact now. I propose rather that we increase—by a little—the length of our monographs: that we make it a rule (1) to prefix a sectional table of contents to every article that runs say, to 25 pp.; (2) to write out, at the end of the article, a summary of its contents, with page or section references; and (3) to supply the editor of the magazine in which the article appears with an analytical index. These proposals can hardly be considered iconoclastic. Tables of contents are prefixed, as it is, to many of the longer papers in this *Journal* and in the *Zeitschrift*. The trouble is only that they are not prefixed to all; and that, when they are printed, they are not sufficiently detailed. Summaries, again, are appended perhaps as often as not. They are likely, however, to be over-condensed, and they do not, as a rule, give back-references to the body of the article. How much a summary can accomplish at its best is admirably shown by Meinong's *Zusammenfassung* (3½ pp.) of his papers (some 160 pp.) on Weber's Law.¹ I have heard it seriously objected that, if the summaries are made too good and too full, readers will attend to them and skip the articles. Well! if the reader is abstracting for a magazine, and merely reprints the summary, the author has surely no ground for complaint; it is his own summary that is reprinted. If, on the other hand, the reader is reading for his own benefit, the objection becomes nonsensical. No serious student would allow himself to think, still less to print, on the basis of a reading of summaries. What the summary does is to give the reader his bearings within the discussion, by way of direction from the author himself. The author is again advantaged, as well as the reader.

The proposal of an analytical index is not, I believe, sanctioned by precedent. Its advantages are, however, clear enough. The author is fresh from his work; he knows its details better than any one else. Volume indexes are now prepared, as a rule, by a business editor, or by his clerk, and neither editor nor clerk is necessarily a psychologist. That our

¹ *Zeits.*, xi, 1896, 399 ff.

volume indexes are as good as they are reflects great credit upon their makers. But they might be incomparably better. And think of the *Studien*! Twenty large volumes, and no index at all! Doubtless, we shall presently have a general index, published as a *Supplementband*; and, doubtless, the general index will be inadequate. Why should not the authors, who can do this work well, and do it with little effort, be expected to hand in an index along with their MSS.?

These things have been in my mind for a long time. But I have been prompted to write out my suggestions by the recent appearance of Vol. i, of the Harvard Psychological Studies. Here is a volume of viii + 654 pp. It contains 16 papers; an average of 40 pp. to a paper. It is not a loose collection of essays; it has a general editor, who declares that "there is no absence of unity in our work;" the work itself has been done, all of it, "by well-trained post-graduate students." Yet there is no single instance of a sectional table of contents. There is no index of any sort or kind. Only six of the sixteen papers have formal summaries. Suppose, then, that the reader goes to the book, not to read some special paper for some special purpose, but with a general question,—as I personally have to go to all psychological books, just now, to see if they contain any reference to mental measurement, and the metric methods, and the blank experiment, and so forth? The title of a paper is no indication; a man may be discussing the immortality of the soul, and yet have his fling at minimal changes. The only thing to do, unless one wants to have these "well-trained post-graduate students" commenting later on one's bibliographical ignorance, is to turn over all their six hundred pages, and see what one finds. I suggest that a very small expenditure of time and trouble on their part, and the printing of some 25 additional pages, would have made the volume indefinitely more valuable to the working psychologist.^{1 2}

¹I may use this opportunity to protest, also, against the mode of publication of Stumpf's *Beiträge zur Akustik und Musikwissenschaft*. These *Beiträge*, as is well known, are to replace the promised third and fourth volumes of the *Tonpsychologie*. Heft 1 contains Stumpf's paper on Consonance and Dissonance: new matter, for which one gladly pays one's Mk. 3. 60, Heft 2, of 170 pp., contains just 3 pp. of new matter; the remaining 167 are reprinted from the *Zeits*. Why should one have to pay Mk. 5 for these 3 pp.? Heft 3, of 146 pp., contains 90 pp. of new and 56 of reprinted matter. Of course, not every one who takes the *Zeits*. takes the *Beitr.*, and conversely. But the experimental psychologist has to read both; and experimental psychologists already have access to the *Zeits*. The present intermixture of new with old material argues at least a lack of consideration on the editor's part.

²As the matter of summaries and indexes is one in which all work-

ing and publishing psychologists are interested, Professor Titchener has invited me to add a note to his paper expressing my views on the subject also. I am happy to do so, for though the matter is a mechanical one and seemingly quite insignificant in comparison with the quality of thinking embodied in the paper, it is just these mechanical aids to work that make more and better work possible. It is a case of the telephone and typewriter over again. I may say then in one word that I heartily concur in all that Professor Titchener urges with reference to the importance of table of contents, summaries and indexes. I do not concur, however, for a moment in his even temporary omission to "stress" the fact that psychological papers are for the most part unconscionably long. A hundred pages are often taken for saying what ought to be said in twenty-five, and could be said if they were confined to a statement of points really demonstrated and essential conditions.

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